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2 Experts on Espionage Unveil Their Spy Novel

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WASHINGTON, April 4 — Two Senators spoke across a pot of coffee in a July predawn in 1980 as the Senate droned on in filibuster.

"If you were not a Senator at this moment in time, where would you rather be?" William S. Cohen, Republican of Maine, asked Gary Hart, Democrat of Colorado.

"I would rather be in Ireland writing a novel," Senator Hart replied.

With that, to pass the hours, the two began to make a fanciful excursion into the world of fiction, jotting notes as they "Ping-Ponged" ideas. An outline for a novel emerged: What might happen if terrorism was exported wholesale into the United States?

They Know the Territory

One answer can be found in their new novel, "The Double Man," a thriller published by William Morrow & Co. that is due in bookstores Monday. It deals with subjects that the two authors know well after years on the Senate Armed Services Committee and the Senate Intelligence Committee: counterintelligence, assassination plots, the drug network, moles and global terrorism. As for the book's central figure, it is a United States Senator who has Presidential ambitions, something Mr. Hart can write about with confidence.

When did the two legislators actually decide to follow through on the outline they laid out that night on Capitol Hill?

"I took a look at the outline the next morning," recalled Senator Cohen, "and thought, 'That's a hell of a good story.'" He telephoned a literary agent, Bill Adler, the three met for dinner. Within 36 hours a publisher was lined up.

The two legislators deliberately kept quiet that they were at work on a

novel. Even the book publishing world was kept largely in the dark.

"We were called X and Y for several months," said Senator Hart with a laugh. "Looking back on it, it's amazing to me how secretive we were about this. It was kept totally secret for three years while we were working on it."

The two men both have previous nonfiction books to their credit, and Senator Cohen has published a book of poetry. They did the bulk of the writing in 1981 and 1982 and assert they used no researchers, no ghost writer. Scenes and episodes were divided up and swapped back and forth for rewriting.

"We both have different talents and learned a lot from each other's writing," said Senator Cohen. "Gary is better with movement, flow, action."

"But Bill is better with color and scenes," Senator Hart replied.

Editors Worked on It, Too

In all, they wrote six or eight drafts, working with their editors at Morrow, who recommended various changes and cuts along the way. "But we made the changes, we did the writing," said Senator Cohen.

They hope readers find the book entertaining, but they also view it as a serious work. "It deals with a serious subject," said Senator Hart, "the emerging problem of terrorism abroad and at home and the history of superpower conflict. I've had experience, first in investigating the C.I.A. and then in overseeing its activities, and some of that experience has troubled me and stuck with me. I suppose fiction is one way to handle it."

Senator Cohen added, "What we've tried to do is to take matters of public record which are virtually unknown by the public and tell it in a way that would make people want to know about it."